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LOCALITY LABELS*

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For the past several months I have been intermittently engaged in sorting and arranging a large collection of one family of beetles representing the accumulation from many sources and over a great period of years. Such a collection should be arranged in some orderly way so that the material may be easily referred to by any person without the aid of the curator and it should be in units of a convenient size. For that reason I have arranged it by dividing it into geographical sections about as we usually study material when revising. For instance, North America, Central America, West Indies, South America, etc. I am not recommending that this is the ideal way for every family. It depends on the size of the family and the object of the collection.

One of the greatest problems in arranging such a miscellaneous mass of material as this is the interpretation of the locality labels. I became greatly impressed with the inadequacy of the majority of labeling. A young aid remarked one day with some disgust, "These foreign collectors never put the country on their locality labels." I asked him to show me a single locality label on a specimen collected in this country by an American collector which had "U.S.A." on it. Yet we exchange with foreign collectors and complain bitterly over the lack of information on the material which we receive in return.

Perhaps we can presuppose a fairly complete knowledge of geography, but I dare say few of us possess anywhere near the knowledge necessary to recognize even the general area of many of the places

*See Hatch, M. H., 1948, "Why Locality Labels", Col. Bul., 2:76, for further information on this subject.

given on the majority of the foreign labels we have to read, unless they were collected by people not residing in that particular area. We seem to label specimens according to our particular knowledge and disregard the fact that the specimen will last long after we have gone to our reward. How we love to use such names as "Duck Lake" or "Anjo P., W. Aust." Find those in an atlas! And it is not restricted to the old labels or to the foreign collectors by any means. We are all guilty of it.

There are probably many reasons for these poor labels. Primarily, I believe the reasons for such abbreviated data notations is the small space into which we find it necessary to crowd this information. Secondly, it is the relatively high cost of printed labels and the great amount of labor necessary to print by hand a series of labels. However, when we consider the time which can be wasted in trying to work with inadequate labels, I feel sure that we can economically afford to spend more time when we label our catches. If it is worth catching and mounting carefully, it is justifiable to spend time on the labels.

There is another excuse offered by many of our collectors. Many of us feel that a large label is a very bad thing. It takes up more room in a box and it might damage adjoining specimens while being pinned into a box. This is a valid objection. That is, until we look at the reasons for maintaining a collection. When we realize that the object is not to see how small and brief we can write a label and how close we can cram specimens into a box and how many specimens we can accumulate, but rather, how carefully we can preserve the results of our field experiences and how fully we can record our data on the specimens so that we may couple our and others' field results with the laboratory studies. If we have inadequate storage facilities, or labeling facilities, or lack the time to handle the material properly, then perhaps we should leave this material in the field. It will always be available when we can use it, perhaps not to us, but to someone. Please understand, I am not advocating that we all stop collecting and work only on museum material; far from it. Certainly we need more and more material, but what we DON'T NEED is more material like we already have!

If the situation is really as bad as I have intimated above, then I am certainly going to be expected to offer some cure for this situation.

I am sure that many collectors have been faced with this problem many times before and have given it serious thought. Frequent attempts have been made to use numbers coupled with field notes, or locality data and numbers referring to more detailed field notes. The lot number system should be outlawed immediately. Notes get lost, and people get lazy when it comes to transferring notes along with exchanges and loans. Locality data and numbers referring to further notes might be permissible, but that does not remedy our basic criticisms,—the deficiency in labels when it is necessary to arrange a collection.

Certainly then, it is necessary to devise some system of getting on to a label of a relatively small size, all of the information necessary to the worker at least in sorting and arranging material and in citing locality data in publications. In devising such a system we must keep two prime factors in mind. The locality information must give enough information to place an area in the worker's mind by using a word which is familiar to the person with the normal amount of geographical knowledge and then give a specific locality which can be found in any reasonably good atlas. This can then be supplemented by any additional information necessary to place the specimen in the exact location. Idealistically, names should be used which are not affected by politics or other changing conditions. I am unaware of any standardized set of geographical names which could be used by collectors the world over regardless of native tongue or social changes. It would certainly be most desirable for the geographers to give us such a set of names in sufficient detail to be of use to us. We could then cite localities the same as we cite Latin names of plants and animals. It could well be that in order to place the specimen exactly, latitude and longitude figures would be necessary. Those of us who are used to three or at most four line labels are certainly not going to be receptive to these suggestions. Yet, I believe all will agree to the original thesis that our labels are inadequate and I at least fail to see how the situation can be improved without more detailed labels.

Inasmuch as we do not now have a standardized geographical nomenclature, we must for the time being be content with improving our present system. Let me summarize by offering these suggestions as to how we can do this.

- (1.) The name of the country or similar large area on the label first. Ex.: BRASIL, CENTRAL EUROPE, JAVA, MICRONESIA, etc.
- (2.) The state, province, department, or some such minor division second. Ex.: N. Y., Orleans Co.; France, Normandie; China, Fukien Prov.
- (3.) The name of the nearest town, or mountain, or river which can be found in an atlas, with directions from that place. Ex.: 20 mi. NNW Arlington; 3,000 ft. NE side White Mt.
- (4.) Perhaps the latitude and longitude if necessary.

The date of the collection, the collector's name and the situation in which collected are customarily included with the locality label, but will have to be on a separate label if the above system is followed. The locality label will then become truly a locality label.

SIZE OF McCLAY COLLECTION

Some months ago we asked people to report the size of collections. One or two such reports were published, but little interest has been shown by the majority of our readers. Of course, the number of specimens in a collection is not as important as the condition of the collection, the accuracy of the locality data and the amount of host or situation information that collection offers. But I believe that information of this sort is valuable to the research worker as a further source for material for revisional studies.

Recently I have obtained from A. T. McClay, information as to the size of his personal collection of beetles. I feel that I should preface his figures with some remarks on the excellent quality of his specimens. Dr. McClay was kind enough to loan me his specimens of Oedemeridae for study when I was making my recent revision of the North American species (in press). I found in several cases, long, well mounted series of species known previously only from the type specimens. The locality information greatly increased our knowledge of the distribution of these species.

I know that Dr. McClay is anxious for qualified persons to make use of this material and to give him identifications of those groups in which he is not actively doing research studies. That is of course the only valid reason for maintaining a collection of this sort. I also know that very few persons have taken advantage of Dr. McClay's generosity. I hope this recommendation will result in the mutual benefit of both Dr. McClay and the revisors concerned and I also hope that those who do take this advantage do not ask to borrow material unless they expect to be able to return it within a reasonable time and